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ABSTRACT

There are several critical five minute periods in any lesson, and it is important for teachers to know how to use them. No matter how long a period may be, the most important five minutes, and no more, should be written out. This writing forces the teacher to put down on paper only the most important items. The first five minutes of a period should be extemporaneous. Any teacher who has carefully written out or thought out the most important five minutes of a lesson is in a good position to look over the group and decide where to begin. The last five minutes of every encountered session should be used to sum up what has been done and to clarify future expectations. The ability to establish some sort of human contact with the class before beginning the professional contact is a sign of a good teacher. The teacher should look around for a friendly face to focus in on before beginning the lesson. If a teacher does a good job in presenting a lesson to at least one learner, there is a great possibility that the rest of the class will catch the main idea. The teacher who looks around for more friendly faces during the five minute warmup will find the class more receptive to what the teacher has to present. Staying around for at least five minutes after the end of a lesson provides the teacher with an opportunity for a followup between self-fulfilling teachers and agressive learners. (RC)

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T I T L E

THE MOST IMPORTANT FIVE MINUTES IN ANY LESSON (OR WORKSHOP)

A U T H O R

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D A T E

November 1975

THE MOST IMPORTANT FIVE MINUTES IN ANY LESSON

Recently, during a series of teacher inservice education workshops conducted as part of a staff development program, one question kept on recurring from the floor: "After all you have said about learner-paced modules and individualization, what are the five most important minutes of any lesson?"

This question was asked over and over again in a variety of formats:

> "How much of my lesson plan should I write out in advance?"
>
> "What part of my lesson plan should be extemporized and developed in front of the learners?"
>
> "When is the best time to summarize the main objective of my lesson or learning package?"
>
> "How can I tell when the learners in front of me are ready for my most important objective?"
>
> "How can I best use the time before the start of class or the beginning of the learning laboratory session?"
>
> "What should I do once the classroom lesson or the learning laboratory session is formally over?"

The above questions are critical in the sense that any attempt to answer them is an exercise in using careful judgment and judicious evaluation.

The above questions are also critical in the sense that answering these questions adequately involves an individual teacher in a significant TURNING POINT. Any teacher who can answer these questions to the teacher's satisfaction and to the satisfaction of the teacher's students has passed a specially important juncture. Any teacher who answers these questions practically is demonstrating indisputable competence.

There are many ways to answer these questions. The following chart, CRITICAL FIVE MINUTES, is the considered opinion of the author. This chart lists a number of significant times in the first column. In the second column, a piece of experienced advice is given for each of the significant times listed.

CRITICAL FIVE MINUTES

Significant Times	Experienced Advice
Most important 5 minutes	Write them out
First 5 minutes	Extemporize them
Last 5 minutes	Add them up
5 minutes before starting	Look around for a friendly face
Post-warmup 5 minutes	Look around for more friendly faces
5 minutes after stopping	Stay around for friendly followup

In the following paragraphs, each of the critical five minutes herein studied will be analyzed.

SIGNIFICANT TIME:

Most important five minutes

EXPERIENCED ADVICE:

Write them out

This recommendation realizes that the typical classroom period lasts anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour and a half.

No matter how long the period may be, it is the opinion of the author that the most important five minutes, and no more, should be written out.

This writing exercise forces the teacher to put down on paper only the most important items. Some teachers find that this exercise forces them to realize that an hour and a half of talking might boil down to no more than one minute of worthwhile writing.

Other teachers who notice that learners never seem to catch on to the important ideas suddenly discover that a 45 minute period is filled with at least two hours of important ideas. This intellectual surplus is seldom recognized until the teacher tries to put on paper the things that have not been successfully said in the alloted class time.

Any teacher who is in the position of stressing only the most important one or two minutes during a 45 minute lesson should not feel obliged to come up with an important five minutes. After all, quality is better than quantity.

Any teacher in the position of trying to cram two hours worth of important minutes into a 45 minute period should not despair. Similarly, the teacher should not tear up the two hours of careful writing.

The teacher who is over-stuffing the class period should verify the fact that everything written out for the two hours is of importance.

If everything is indeed important, this teacher should subdivide the two hours into 24 distinct lessons.

If, for all practical purposes, the teacher realizes that such a subdivision process would simply impede the natural flow of the content, schedule, examination requirements, professional licensing requirements, or other considerations, the teacher should present the two hours to the students in written format.

Then, the teacher would be able to zero in on five minutes of the learner's choice.

When learners are allowed to decide what is important, a sudden change takes place in the educational process. The teacher is no longer only a task master. The teacher becomes a friend and consultant, who is always there when help is needed. This piece of experienced advice might be summarized thus: as a maximum, write out only the most important five minutes.

SIGNIFICANT TIME:

First 5 minutes.

EXPERIENCED ADVICE:

Extemporize them

It is not unusual to receive the following advice from professional speech givers:

> Write out the first 5 minutes
> Write out the last 5 minutes
> Five minutes before your talk is over, start giving the last 5 minutes

As appropriate as this advice might be for professional orators, it is inappropriate to teachers.

The teacher can never be certain until class begins what is the best way to start the lesson.

The teacher can never be certain, until the class is almost over and feedback has been obtained from the learners, about exactly what is the best way to end the lesson by suggesting an appropriate next step for the learner.

The ability to extemporize appropriately is an acquired skill.

As Woodrow Wilson reminds us, it is easier to talk without interuption for 2 hours than to come up with a good off the cuff five minute summary.

The ability to walk into a room, whether a lecture hall, a classroom, or a learning center, and to look over the group while trying to decide where to begin is a COMPETENCY that requires much practice.

Any teacher who has carefully written out or thought out the most important five minutes of a lesson is in a good position to look over the group and to decide where to begin. An authoritarian teacher will begin the class by the sound of the bell, a gavel, or a loud noise. Some strong-willed educators will stare the class into silence before pronouncing a single word. Friendlier types will start speaking slowly and let the silence spread as more students become interested in the instructor.

There are many ways to succeed during the first five minutes of a lesson. Some teachers will rely upon the inspiration of the moment. Other teachers will methodically spell out 5 or 6 alternatives to do in a variety of situations. Other teachers will start off with the same ritual as the students are allowed to quiet down and settle down for a session of learning.

In brief, no matter what happens during the first five minutes of a lesson, make sure it is appropriate to motivating the group, to brightening the occasion, and for setting the stage for today's objectives.

SIGNIFICANT TIMES:

The last 5 minutes

EXPERIENCED ADVICE:

Add them up

In some quarters, it is considered a sign of politeness and good taste to prolong the final farewell. What could have taken 30 seconds is sometimes protracted to last 30 minutes. In this way, both the host and the departing guests have a chance to stretch and stand up in front of an open door.

When all is said and done, probably this prolonged exit is better than the speaker who suddenly stops talking at the sound of a bell. It's true that the speaker has stopped talking and the students are leaving the room. Unfortunately, unless the class is drawn to a conclusion, the mere act of stopping one's speech is insufficient to terminate a well organized lesson.

There is nothing magic in the ability to using either an alarm clock, a wristwatch, or a wall clock to notice when the period is just about over. If the students and teachers are accustomed to summarizing a good lesson during the last five minutes, the students will remind the teacher that it is time to terminate and summarize.

In some situations, the last five minutes allow the class to ask necessary questions to carry out assignments or to understand future expectations. In other situations, the teacher seizes the initiative and presents a capsulized version of the most important points of the lesson.

There is certainly nothing the matter with preparing a final conclusion of five minutes on the part of a teacher. On the other hand, there is something seriously the matter with giving this final five minute conclusion unaltered EVEN IF the learners have not caught on to the main point of the lesson.

It is very difficult to quantify how much can be learned in a given period of time. However, let's make a stab at it.

There is research extant to indicate that the average group, with the average teacher, with the average variety of motivation, and with the average set of circumstances can absorb approximately one major idea fully explained every 15 minutes.

This would mean that in the first 40 minutes of a 45 minute period, the group and teacher have thoroughly explored three main ideas. Sometimes, using the last five minutes to add up these three main ideas is a good way to get compound interest.

This compound interest refers to the profit that can be derived from repetition.

This compound interest can also refer to the added enjoyment of looking at the previous three ideas in a new combination. It's similar to the exhilaration felt by rearranging the same old pieces of furniture in a room. The new look makes the den more interesting and more enjoyable.

The worst error a teacher can make during the last five minutes is to try to introduce two or three brand new ideas for which the students are not prepared. There is only so much that can be crammed into five minutes. In general, don't over-estimate the ability of the students to absorb a lot of pithy ideas expressed in succinct phrases that mean so much to the teacher but so little to the beginner.

In brief, use the last five minutes of every encountered session in order to sum up what has been done and to clarify future expectations.

SIGNIFICANT TIMES:

Five minutes before starting

EXPERIENCED ADVICE:

Look around for a friendly face

Five minutes before the class starts, the professor walks in the room, places his notes on the desk, and pretends to ignore everyone there.

Exactly at the sound of the bell, the professor becomes alive, starts to smile, and looks around. He wishes to win over the class and begin his lesson.

Five minutes before the class starts, the students seem to ignore the presence of the teacher and go on talking to one another or looking furtively over class notes if an examination is to follow.

At the beginning of the class period, the students come to order. All of a sudden, all distractions are put away in order to concentrate full attention on the teacher.

The ability to establish some sort of human contact with the class before beginning the professional contact is a sign of a good teacher. The teacher who looks around for a friendly face is trying to make sure that the objectives of the lesson are placed in the perspective of every day life activities.

The tendency of certain individuals to live in airtight compartments is undesirable in education. Some individuals act one way in the classroom and another in daily life. It's almost as if the classroom were an airtight compartment and the daily life were another airtight compartment.

It's not to be wondered at that certain students never establish any relationship between the objectives mastered in school and the exigencies of everyday life.

To help make this transition, the teacher must use every human and professional resource available.

This type of horizontal interaction between learner and teacher is comparable to a two-way street. A vertical relationship would have to imply that either the objectives of the teacher or the objectives of the learner had preeminence over the other.

Certain teachers who have difficulty with knowing how to begin a lesson try to resolve this problem by focusing in on one individual. It is assumed that if one individual can be interested and made to realize the importance of today's objectives that the rest of the group will catch on.

This is a key element in trying to differentiate between the necessity for planning and the necessity for spontaneity on the part of both teacher and student.

In this way, education can be seen as an interaction between a learner trying to educate oneself and the teacher as an organizer of educational environments filled with opportunities for self-advancement on the part of the learner.

SIGNIFICANT TIMES:

Post-warmup 5 minutes

EXPERIENCED ADVICE:

Look around for more friendly faces

Some teachers try to treat the students like automatons.

Treating a student like an automaton is presuming that telling one funny story, one semi-related story, and one directly related story is sufficient to turn the learners on to the lesson's objective. There is no magic lever to pull to convince the entire class that what the teacher has to say is worthwhile.

One of the most practical ways to gain the momentum of the group on the side of the teacher is to start off with one friendly face. Actors often admit that playing to one face in the crowd gives the stage presence necessary to win over the entire audience. Similarly, if a teacher does a good job in presenting a lesson to at least one learner, there is a great probability that the rest of the class will catch the main idea.

Every subject matter or profession has its own logic.

Every individual learner has a unique collection of interests and predispositions.

A course-chopper chops up every lesson into individual components. Each component is alloted so much time whether or not the learners already know it or whether or not the learners catch on immediately.

The course-chopper provides one component of the course after another without thinking of the reaction in the individual learners.

Sometimes, educational researchers conclude that very few people really understand how human beings learn.

For example, some people catch on slowly, piece by piece. Other individuals equally as intelligent learn by leaps and bounds, by heaping spoonfuls and not by baby spoonfuls. There is a wide range of individual differences between learning by baby spoonfuls and learning by giant spoonfuls. Some learners seem to chew and rechew the same materials while others seem to swallow down and gobble up every piece of information that comes from the teacher. Carried to an extreme, the AGGRESSIVE LEARNER is able to formulate objectives, develop acceptable evaluation criteria, and choose from a wide variety of alternatives. In such a situation, the learner is king.

From another point of view, LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS are products of teachers who have arranged a contingency of stimuli and responses in such a way as to almost force every learner to learn. Unfortunately, some learning environments are misinterpreted as agents while the students are misinterpreted as passive recipients of tranquillizers, not stimulants.

In a vertical model of learning, either the AGGRESSIVE LEARNER or the LEARNING ENVIRONMENT must predominate and have its way on the other.

In a horizontal model of interaction, boththe AGGRESSIVE LEARNER and the LEARNING ENVIRONMENT interact in such a way as to make learning more dynamic, more realistic, and more personal.

It's much the same way with breathing. Obviously, fresh air is part of the environment. Just as obviously, the lungs are part of the human organism. However, the process we call respiration is the mingling of the environment of fresh air with the organism of the lungs in order to produce human vitality. So far, this stress on the post-warmup five minutes has pointed the necessity to consider both the AGGRESSIVE LEARNER and the LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.

A further analysis will consider the necessity to give due respect to both the INDIVIDUAL and the GROUP.

In brief, the teacher who looks around for more friendly faces during the five minute warmup will find the class, both as individuals and as a group, more receptive to what the teacher has to present. In addition, the teacher who treats the class as human beings capable of knowledge, choice, and activity will also find the class, both as individuals and as groups, more active in the pursuit of excellence.

Some teachers misinterpret the stress on the post-warmup five minutes as an attempt to make the class more passive and receptive to what the teacher says. On the contrary, this stress on the post-warmup five minutes is intended to stress the necessity of making the class more active and creative in the human interaction called education.

SIGNIFICANT TIMES:

Five minutes after stopping

EXPERIENCED ADVICE:

Stay around for friendly followup

Few individuals, whether teachers or students, would go to an interesting movie and walk out at the climax. After all, everyone wants to find out how the movie ended.

When a teacher enters the classroom for the first time, the teacher is in the position of an individual entering a movie that has already started. After a while, the teacher catches on to what has happened previously in the education and life of the students.

A teacher who walks out of the classroom at the end of an individual course or at the end of a term is in the position of a person who walks out of the movie before seeing the ending. In a very true sense, no teacher can ever find out the final ending of the life of most students.

However, staying around for five to ten minutes after a class is a good way to spot the eager beavers. Eager beavers are here used as synonyms for aggressive learners. Aggressive learners know what they want, know how to evaluate effective results, and demand a wide variety of alternatives from which to choose.

To be perfectly frank, it is doubtful that an aggressive learner can achieve complete satisfaction in a typical classroom.

Just as there are aggressive learners, so there can be SELF-FULFILLING TEACHERS.

A self-fulfilling teacher is able to manifest a confidence that doesn't appear in the functioning of a beginning teacher who has never been able to turn an indifferent learner on to the world of ideas, skills, and values.

The self-fulfilling teacher has developed both for the teacher and for the student a relationship which is unique, warm, and self-rewarding.

Without going to the extreme of becoming palsy-walsy, the self-fulfilling teacher is able to change over gradually from a role of authority to a role of partnership.

The self-fulfilling teacher is able to help each individual become self-directing, automonous, creative, innovative, and aggressive towards educational progress. In brief, the SELF-FULFILLING TEACHER is able to turn out AGGRESSIVE LEARNERS. When all is said and done, its not so much that the self-fulfilling teacher turns out aggressive learners as much as it is a phenomenon that self-fulfilling teachers are often found in the company of aggressive learners.

A scholar has learned to learn for oneself. A self-fulfilling teacher has learned how to learn for others. It might be more proper to say that a self-fulfilling has learned how to make students more active, more self-actualizing, and more aggressive by trusting them more.

Anytime the learner considers himself as a puppet completely pulled and directed by the teacher type of a puppet master, something is wrong with education. Manipulation has replaced trust.

One way to remedy this situation is for the teacher to stay around for at least five minutes after stopping a lesson in order to provide an opportunity for friendly followup between self-fulfilling teachers and aggressive learners. This allows respect to reinforce trust.

As a concluding comment on the most important five minutes in a lesson, it can be said that the important point for the teacher is to activate the learner, by trust as well as by discipline.

CONCLUSION

So much has been said in educational literature on the activity of the teacher that it is easy to forget that sometimes the passivity of the teacher is just as important. In a way, trusting is passive.

It is easy to think of examples where an over-active parent rendered the child passive and dependent to such an extent that the child never did anything. After a while, the child developed a habit of never doing anything because of too much contrast and not enough trust.

In other families, an almost pathetically inactive parent has somehow or other fostered the inverse reaction in the child. In other words, the offspring of passive parents sometimes become very active, self-reliant, and dependable. Verbally or nonverbally, trust was there.

If the teacher does too much in the classroom, there is always the danger that the learner becomes dependent rather than dependable.

As is obvious from the above demonstration, the author feels that the most important five minutes in a class, a learning laboratory, or a discussion are the five minutes within which the learner becomes active. This is the kind of learner referred to above as an AGGRESSIVE LEARNER. The kind of teacher that produces aggressive learners is called a SELF-FULFILLING TEACHER. In this expression, the self obviously refers to both the self of the teacher and to the self of the learner.

APPLICATION

So far, many of the readers of this article have been passive recipients of the author's idea.

It might be a good thing at this time for the readers to go back to the six questions posed in the opening paragraphs. All of these questions have been treated directly or indirectly in the previous exposition.

Readers who are able to answer these six questions as a result of reading this article and discussing it are definitely active learners in the most educational sense of the adjective AGGRESSIVE. This kind of learner can be trusted to self-actualize because self-discipline has so obviously been demonstrated.

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